

We are happy to present selected pages from our Parish Magazine.

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VICAR'S LETTER

Do you know the story of the "Prodigal Son?" If you don't, can I ask you to have a quick recap by looking at the Gospel of Luke 15: 11-32.

What do you see in this story? Is it just a nice story that you have heard many times before or was there something new as you revisited it or perhaps read it for the first time?

There is so much in this one story which can lift our eyes from ourselves to the throne of God's grace.

I love this story because it so often shows me the things that I miss about God's love for each of us. Just as the son in the story wants his own way, we too often try to go it alone without reference to the God who created us. I recently overheard a conversation where someone was asking how they could become a Christian and when told that all they had to do was let God take control of their life, their head dropped as they said "I don't want God or anyone to be in charge of my life".

This conversation was not unusual but sad for me nevertheless. You see, as someone who has lived for more than half a century I have been through many of the problems of life and realise that I can't do it alone. I need to know that there is someone bigger than me in control of the world I travel through. I have been a prodigal on occasions and tried to go my own way but have always been very glad of the security of a loving arm when I mess up.

The Father in the story is always the father and the son always the son, no matter where they find themselves. Jesus never talks of a time when the father disowns the son nor a time when he forgives him. I find this reassuring and hope you too will take time to look at where you are with God.

For many both inside and outside the church community we take God and our right to a relationship for granted; is this security in the God we follow or just wishful thinking?

No matter where you are in your story, you can be sure that God is right where you left Him. That is everywhere! You see God can't forget you even if you forget Him. He is part of His creation and longs for the day when we all, like the son in our story, return to a closer relationship with Him. Will you make time for God in your life? If you need help, that's what the church exists for and we will help if we can, but the first step must come from you.

Bishop Paul has been encouraging the people of the Diocese to read through Mark's Gospel during the summer; if you missed the challenge why not commit yourself to taking it up now? It will be a good preparation for Advent and Christmas.

God bless you all.

Harvie

IT'S SHOEBOX TIME AGAIN!

The most important Christmas present that I gave to anyone last year was to a child I will never meet. It wasn't expensive. I did spend time looking round the shops, choosing the best looking cuddly toy – the one with the most friendly face in my opinion- and other items including notebook, pencils, toothbrush and toothpaste to go with the toy. I then wrapped a shoebox in Christmas paper, and put everything in it. As many of you who regularly do the same thing will have guessed, I was making up a shoebox for the “Operation Christmas Child” campaign, run by a Christian charity called Samaritan's Purse.

The campaign, which started out in a very small way well over 20 years ago, has gone from strength to strength. My box was one of 678,942 that were sent out last year to over 13 countries all over the world. The campaign aims to give a Christmas present to as many children as possible who live in poverty. Children who would not be getting a present at all, if it were not for us. Children who have probably never had anything to call their own. Some children live with their families where the parents can hardly afford to buy enough food. Often the look of delight on their child's face as they receive their shoebox reduces the parent to tears.

Other children live in children's homes. A story I will never forget was told by a volunteer from England who had travelled to a remote location in Asia through ice and snow to help distribute the shoeboxes. They were giving out the boxes to children in the local orphanage. One little boy was delighted to find a pair of warm gloves in his box. He quickly put them on, then noticed that his brother didn't have any gloves in his shoebox. So he quickly took one off, and handed it to his brother. He didn't have much, but was willing to share what he did have. Each year the volunteers who fly out to play a part in the distribution of the shoeboxes bring back similar stories.

Because of the wonders of modern technology, I know that my box went to a child living in Central Asia last Christmas. My shoebox was tracked because I put a barcode in my shoebox that was generated when I donated the contribution to delivery costs online. Because it is such a massive operation, the shoeboxes are collected up in November, and then taken to warehouses to be sorted. Most of the costs of transport in the UK are minimal because large companies give their warehousing and transport costs for free, but costs in the countries of destination have to be paid for, so a contribution of £5 per box is requested.

The children who receive the shoeboxes are chosen solely because of their need. They are often not from Christian backgrounds. The shoeboxes are given out regardless of colour or creed. In fact, in some of the countries it is very difficult to be a Christian. For this reason, Operation Christmas Child are vague about the precise destination to protect the workers there. However, there are quite a few stories of how people who have come into contact with a shoebox have become Christians once they have heard why we have given the present.

A shoebox is an excellent way to celebrate the birth of Christ who came to tell us all that there is a God of love who cares for everybody, no matter how poor they are. If you would like to make a shoebox this year, please pick up a leaflet from the back of church. The leaflet has a list of the items you can put in your box, and a label to stick on the lid so that the gifts are age appropriate. Please bring your filled box to church anytime in October and up till Sunday **4th November**.

We'll see how large a shoebox mountain we can build in church this year!

Joyce Eddlestone

A BRIEF SALUTE TO PERCY FRENCH (Buried in St. Luke's Churchyard in 1920)

I have spent a lifetime involved one way or other with song, both 'classical' and popular. My taste is eclectic, much influenced when I was a teenager in the 1950s by such wonderful radio programmes as Friday Night Is Music Night from the Fairfield Hall, Croydon, which offered a vast range of music and performers. Percy French's songs were often to be heard on the radio when I was growing up, pre-Beatles et al. I treasure early memories of my father warbling *Mountains of Mourne* and *Come Back Paddy Riley* while shaving or applying his beloved Brylcreem! I also have a vivid memory of a church social evening in my home village. I was about 11 then, and we were welcoming our new vicar after a difficult interregnum. The new vicar was Irish, 75, about 6ft 6in and very lame. He had just retired from his post as the Missionary Bishop of Chekiang in China. He must have guessed at the unease in our tiny village, where hopes had been set on a vibrant young parson. Clad in his purple bishop's cassock Bishop John Curtis stood up to greet the gathering following a rather convoluted introduction from the vicar's warden, and instead of the expected formal speech, he said he would like to get the evening off to a good start, and launched into a brilliant, unaccompanied rendition of *Phil the Fluther's Ball* in the broadest of Irish accents. He was a hit! He was a devoted vicar and a great friend to me as I grew up. Those were my first experiences of Percy French's songs, and they stick in the mind. Later on, I sang many myself.

I was surprised to learn a few years ago that William Percy French is buried here in St. Luke's churchyard. I have lately been spurred on to research him properly after reading of the steadily growing renewed recognition of him as a watercolour painter as well as a great songwriter and entertainer. I had never previously really looked further than the songs themselves, and suddenly wanted to know more about him - and what made him tick.

William Percy French was born on May 1st 1854 and was destined to become recognised, and indeed revered, as one of Ireland's foremost entertainers and songwriters, and also to be become rated as a gifted painter of water colours.

He was the son of an Anglo-Irish landlord and was born in Cloonyquin House near Tulsk in County Roscommon. After attending a fine school in Londonderry, he went to Trinity College Dublin to study Civil Engineering. He was not over keen to go and certainly not keen on Civil Engineering (though he did eventually graduate successfully). While a student there he immersed himself in the social life, particularly in the music scene and joined a group known as the 'Smokers'. It was with them that he began to hone his song writing talent and entertaining skills.

He wrote his first successful song in 1877 for a 'smoking concert'. At the time he was quite ignorant about such things as copyright and sold the song, *Abdul Abulbul Amir*, to an unscrupulous publisher for £5. It became immensely popular and was subsequently claimed by a number of other composers as their work.

After he graduated he worked as an inspector of drains, and the songs which he wrote during that period are probably among his best. In songs such as the *Mountains of Mourne* one senses his love of landscape and shoreline, and an intense feeling for friendship and community in *Come Back Paddy Riley*. As well as song writing, he became a prolific painter of landscape and certainly, at that time, considered painting to be his main artistic talent. His paintings done during his time as a civil engineer are considered by many to be among his best. His reputation as a painter grew alongside his growing reputation as an entertainer and songwriter. When his job dried up, due to funding cuts, Percy briefly tried journalism. This was not fruitful and so he at last began his long and illustrious career as a full time professional entertainer. He had married Ethel Kathleen Armitage-Moore, the niece of the Earl of Anglesey's wife, a young woman some 17 years his junior and he was devastated when she died aged 20 while giving birth to their daughter, who also died. Percy threw himself into his

music and his reputation grew evermore and was now laced with even more capacity for sensitivity, emotion, and regret. However, variety of content is always important in a concert, and he depended much on his wonderful comic songs which he wrote as ballast to the underlying strain of emotion in so many of his songs.

His intuitive grasp of the ridiculous was demonstrated when he wrote a song mocking County Clare's rural rail railway system, which he titled *Are Ye Right There Michael?* The railway company took him to court accused of libel. He is said to have arrived late at court and when asked to account for this he explained to the judge that he had come on the West Clare Railway. The case was dismissed!

He went from strength to strength as a polished entertainer, taking his one man show of poems, songs and prose to many parts of the world. He also wrote and performed in collaboration with a stage partner, his long-time friend Huston Collison.

In January 1920 when he was 65, Percy became ill while performing in Glasgow. He was taken south to England, to the home of his cousin, Canon Johnny Richardson, the Vicar of Holy Trinity Church Formby, who lived in College Road. Percy died there on January 24th having developed pneumonia. He was buried in the churchyard of St. Luke's Church, as Holy Trinity did not have a churchyard.

My article is, of necessity, only a brief look at his life and a salute to his talents, and to the admiration which he has engendered over the last 120 years or so. My appetite for learning still more has now been whetted by several DVDs featuring various good Irish singers, particularly the great Brendan O'Dowda, performing Percy's songs. These seem to me surprisingly fresh, original and always easy on the ear, both words and music being delightfully apt with a wonderful lightness of touch.

William Percy French has a place in the life of St. Luke's. Each year a wreath laying ceremony is led by the Vicar at his grave after morning service on the Sunday nearest to his birthday, May 1st. One of Percy's paintings hangs in the Meeting Room at the Church. How good it is that St; Luke's have kept alive the memory of a man of such talents, who has given pleasure and food for thought to millions of people for the last 120 years.

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Editor – Bob Wagstaff recently received a copy of the latest issue of “The Jarvey” – the newsletter of the Percy French society. Below a photo of Philip Lowe laying the wreath on Percy French's grave on Sunday April 29th, there are the following words:-

“If there is a special place or incident that can be given pride of place for the emergence of our society, it is surely the grave of Percy French at St. Luke's Church, Formby. As if by some outside guidance, some 40 years ago, our founder Oscar Rollins came

upon the resting place of Percy French. It was 1st May, French's birthday, and an unknown admirer had placed a bunch of bluebells on the grave. Oscar was inspired by the poignancy of those moments to use his influence as businessman and North Downs councillor to have Percy French and his works given greater recognition and appreciation.

Over the years our members have made 2 visits to Formby where the kindly people of St. Luke's have made us warmly welcome.

(These visits were in 2002 and 2013 – on the 2nd occasion, a concert of Percy French's music and poetry was held at the RAFA Club in Freshfield).

ST. LUKE'S PRIMARY SCHOOL

Everyone has come back to school this September with a smile on their face ready for the new term and for all the exciting challenges to come. We are all especially excited in Year 6 because this will be our final year at St Luke's before we move on to High School; we all want to make the most of our time and enjoy every second!

Parliamentary Visit

On the 11th of September, Rachel Dodgeson from the Parliament Outreach Programme came to visit KS2. At the start of the morning we had a special assembly with Rachel where she talked about parliament and how laws are made with a slide show.

She showed us photographs of Parliament, explaining to us how the MPs debate and create new laws; she described the history and she told us how Parliament is divided into several parts including the House of Lords (where experts sit to debate and pass new laws and it has red material covering the benches) and the House of Commons (which is where MPs, including our Prime Minister, sit to debate, and it has green material across the benches).



Later in the morning, Rachel came into Year 6 and we had our own debate, discussing whether or not children under the age of 11 should have access to technology. Rachel divided us into two parties – and depending on which side of the class we were sat on we had to debate for or against, using persuasive devices to communicate our ideas.

Rachel also told us that the most important person in Parliament is called the Speaker of the House of Commons – currently John Bercow. This person tells people when to speak and also shouts “ORDER, ORDER!” when people get too rowdy. Amber was our ‘Speaker of the House’ and she did a great job; “thank you, Madam Speaker!”

We are all looking to doing lots of exciting things this year, especially CLAC in a few weeks’ time to do a variety of water sports. We hope the weather is sunny and warm for our trip!

We are also really excited about the forthcoming Open Day on Sunday the 23rd of September. We are looking forward to the opportunity to be ambassadors for our school, showing prospective parents and children around our amazing school. Hopefully we will see some of you there!

Written by Maisie and Jasmine

WHAT'S ON FOR THE ELDERLY IN OCTOBER

(A LISTED MONTHLY PROGRAMME OF EVENTS COMPILED IN AGREEMENT BY ST LUKE'S, ST PETER'S AND HOLY TRINITY ANGLICAN CHURCHES, FORMBY METHODISTS AND FORMBY LIBRARY)

St Peter's Church Formby Bier House (Green Lane)

- (i) **Singing for Fun* (themes from the movies)** – Monday 1st October 2.00-3.30pm.
- (ii) **The Saturday Crew*** – Saturday 6th October 10.30-12noon.
- (iii) **Shoebox Appeal** – Wednesday 17th October 10.00-4.00pm in the Church Hall. Empty, covered shoeboxes will be available, and Shoebox Express will be there with everything you need to fill them at affordable prices! Ready made boxes will also be available for £5.00. If you cannot come along on the day, shoeboxes are available to order for £5 each which includes a donation of £1 towards the cost of shipping the boxes to needy children. Please put your money into an envelope with your name on and pass to one of the churchwardens or into the office – boxes distributed by International Aid (a locally based Christian charity) to needy children both at home and abroad. Thank you!

(* Free dementia friendly events with activities and light refreshments. Circular F1 and F2 stop outside church).

For further information on any of the above, contact St Peter's Parish Office 01704 871171 or email: stpetersformby@gmail.com (website: www.stpetersformby.co.uk).

St Luke's Church Meeting Room (St Luke's Church Road)

- (i) **Out to Lunch** – Tuesday 2nd and 16th October 12noon.

Circular F3 stops nearby.

Formby Methodist Church (Elbow Lane)

- (i) **Dementia Awareness talk (Sally Nicol)** – Saturday 29th September 10.00-12noon.
- (ii) **Memory Café (organised by the Alzheimer's Society)** - Thursday 11th October 2.00-4.00pm.

Formby Library

- (i) **Scrabble and Games Group** – Tuesday afternoons 2.00-4.00pm throughout October.
- (ii) **Coffee Morning** – 10.00-12noon Thursday 4th October.
- (iii) **Beehive events** – for information contact resident beekeeper, Andrea: buzz@beehivesandbookworms.co.uk or Formby Library: 01704 874177.

Formby Friends of the Alzheimer's Society, Luncheon Club (Rosemary Lane)

- (i) **Varied programme** – Saturday 6th October 10.30-12.30pm (light refreshments); call Vicky or Bob on 01704 873317 for further information.

Rotarian's 980 mile cycle ride to raise funds for Formby Befriending Scheme

Liz Foggan and her husband Matt are raising funds for the local charity **Formby Befriending Scheme**. They will be cycling from Lands End to John O'Groats between 8th to 16th September and are doing their ride through Deloitte's annual 'Ride Across Britain'. They have purchased Sponsorship can be made via a donation page at <http://uk.virginmoneygiving.com/giving/>



Sponsorship can be made via a donation page at <http://uk.virginmoneygiving.com/giving/> (search for Liz Foggin or Formby Befriending Scheme). Alternatively, you can call Liz directly at Autumn Years Law on 01704 870404 for further information about the ride and 07437 479417 for more information about the Formby Befriending Scheme.

Ken Davies

HOW'S YOUR MEMORY?

A few years ago an episode in my life happened, the memory of which still worries me. How on earth did I make that mistake, I ask myself? I had driven into Southport and parked the car near the centre. Shopping done, I returned to find the car missing. Up and down the street I went but no sign of my little A to B machine. Convinced that it had been stolen I went to the Police Station and told of the theft. After seeing the Desk Sergeant I sat down with a plain clothed officer and went through all the details of the car, the time I had left it and the place where I had parked. He looked puzzled when I described the street. 'You can't have parked there, Sir' he said. 'Didn't you see all the double yellow lines and I don't think that you are a Blue Badge owner. I think that you should look for your car in the parallel street.' I did and there was my car. What an idiot I felt! It was after that that I began to suspect that cells drop off your brain as you grow older. Barbara at times says that I am not fit to be let loose! What that policeman thought of me, I can't imagine.

Then in the Gospels I find that I am not alone in forgetting things. In Mark's Gospel there is the story of the feeding of the four thousand, (five thousand in Matthew.) After the miracle of the loaves and fishes by the lake side, Jesus and the disciples escaped the crowds by crossing the lake. On the other side a bit of a row started among the disciples because they had forgotten to bring any bread with them except for one loaf in the bottom of the boat which they had obviously missed. They got short shrift from Jesus not because they had forgotten the picnic when they had left behind so much food with the crowds but that they hadn't realised that their real problem was the Jerusalem authorities. However it's comforting to know that Peter and Co. could, in the presence of such a miracle, forget things just like you and I.

So how is your memory? With the car episode I thought that I was losing my marbles but there are some things that we bury deep in our memories because they are too painful to contemplate. Every now and then they come back to haunt us when something suddenly triggers them off. However, on the surface, Barbara seems to be my memory at times now- adays and we sometimes remind ourselves of a good friend whose wife called him 'Shudder.' Why, we asked? and received the reply, 'because he should've done this and he should've done that!' Know the feeling?

Often we don't like to be reminded of the larger questions in life, such as what is our relationship to the man who fed all those people by the lakeside so long ago. Then again what is our relationship with that building at the end of Kirklake Road which, on the surface, seems to be a car park for dog walkers? What have we forgotten about a building like that? Have we forgotten what it stands for? Perhaps we have forgotten our Baptism and the promises made by Mum and Dad and our Godparents? What about those Confirmation vows or was it just part of the social sausage machine at the time? Forgotten even our marriage vows?

And there again the writer of The Second Letter to Peter seems to know all about memory. There he is banging on about having to remind his readers of all he has taught them. While I am here, he says, I intend to keep refreshing your memories so that when I am gone you will be able to recall them. If, he says, you keep recalling your faith you will not be led into the ways of the world around you and he goes on to list all the horrible things people of his or any age get up to.

There is of course a corollary here. I can remember Barbara's Pop saying all those years ago, 'Whatever they take away from you, they can't take away your memories.' Sadly that is not always the case today as we know with the problem of Dementia in all its forms. It's good to know that here at St Luke's there is an awareness of the problem. It is taken seriously in our parish and the teaching we have been given is of practical help in making us aware that it really is no joke to lose ones memory.

I've treated 'memory' lightly in this article as we all seem to be tarred with jokes on this subject. But in laughing among ourselves let us remind each other that for some of us there may come a time when the laughter stops.

Rev. Roy Baker